

FEAST

The Guardian Guide to Bay Area Food and Drink Spring 2010



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The Guardian Guide to Bay Area Food and Drink
— Spring 2010 —



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GUARDIAN PHOTO BY ROBERT GUZMAN

Take a bite

Are you feeling fresh? We certainly are. Welcome to the spring 2010 edition of Feast: The Guardian Guide to Bay Area Food and Drink. It's that tangy season when produce — and, this being the Bay, produce politics — begins to bloom. And we want to dive in, hoes in hand, by celebrating some of our favorite breakfast treats, scrumptious brunches, delectable deserts, fresh cocktails, and community helping hands. So pull on those rough garden gloves, tip your fashionable sun hat, brush away any pesky bristles, and grab your favorite fork. It's time for some mighty good eatin'! Visit www.sfbg.com for more mouthwatering treats.

Marke B.
 Feast 2010 Editor
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GUARDIAN PHOTO BY CHARLES RUSSO

6 voluptuous buns

Pools of ink and its electronic equivalent have been expended helping SF's legions of night-crawlers find the best drinks, beats, and eats. Not so for our less numerous early-risers. But there are plenty of reasons to get up early: seagulls materializing out of the fog, the sun rising over the bay, first pressings at Ritual, parking spaces, and, perhaps most important, *morn-ing buns*. Specifically, *warm* morning buns.

Unlike the *Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana's* rules on pizza (dough no higher than 1/8 inch thick, hand-kneaded only), the French-inspired morning bun has some latitude. Buns can be made with brioche dough or croissant dough; flavored with cinnamon, or orange, or both. Puff pastry does not raise cries of *quelle horreur!* But whatever the yeast-risen dough base, the ideal MB should be a

"turned" pastry, layered with butter and spices, then dusted with sugar and baked to caramelized crispness. Nuts, raisins, or frosting mean you have strayed — egad — into snail or danish territory.

Like bagels, MBs also are the perfect food ephemera. By 9:30 a.m. the chances of finding a still-warm one have passed. By 11 a.m., they have aged out completely. So set your alarm and get in line. **(Diane Sussman)**

SANDBOX BAKERY

This small Bernal Heights newcomer is already making a name for itself for its superlative sandwiches, kashi pans, and pastries (I'm talking to you, Valrhona pain au chocolat), and its MB is no exception. Starting with a brioche dough, Sandbox MB has a crisp, flaky top that gives way to fragrant, generous layers of cinnamon, sugar, and

orange doughy bliss. Even better, this is one bun source where you can still get a warm one even if you sleep in (sort of). Although the bakery opens at 7 a.m., one staffer revealed that its MBs don't usually come out of the oven until 7:30.

833 Cortland, SF. (415) 642-8580.
www.sandboxbakerysf.com

TARTINE BAKERY

Scoring an MB at Tartine requires a strategy. Well before it opens (times vary), Tartine has lines out the door. Granted, not everyone is there for an MB, but that doesn't alleviate fears among MB heads that the person ahead of you line won't order five dozen. In addition, Tartine Mbers have subgenres of preferences, preferring "light on the bottom." But not to worry. All colors of Tartine's MBs (which start with croissant dough) have crisp, sweet, flaky, muffin-like tops with soft, yeasty, buttery centers sprinkled with orange, cinnamon, and sugar. In addition to competition, Tartine's MBs are also more expensive (\$3.75 compared to \$2-\$2.50 elsewhere). 600 Guerrero, SF. (415) 487-2600.
www.tartinebakery.com

DELESSIO MARKET AND BAKERY

Delessio is the MB slug-a-bed's dream joint. The combination deli-bakery doesn't open until 8 a.m., and even then the bakers often run 10 to 15 minutes late. (Value add: sometimes the friendly staff will let you pluck your own MB from the cooling rack — use paper!). Delessio's offering is moist, flaky (it uses a brioche dough), not too sweet, and generous with cinnamon. Delessio does have one tragic flaw, though: it doesn't bake those buns every day. Call first or learn a vital lesson in flexibility with the breakfast brioche. 1695 Market and 302 Broderick, SF. (415) 552-5559 and (415) 552-8077. www.delessiomarket.com

LA BOULANGE

Stare into one of the pastry cases at Boulange and you'll see the signs for "morning

buns." But Boulange's morning bun isn't really a morning bun, as one staff member readily acknowledged. "We call them cinnamon-orange buns," she said. "They are our own version of morning buns." Starting with a croissant dough, Boulange MBs are flatter and rounder than a traditional morning bun, don't have the crispy, caramelized sugar muffin top, and have a bit more orange than others. While purists may shriek, "Wrong!" iconoclasts are likely to counter with "Nice!" (Whole Foods also carries Boulange's buns in its bakery cases.)

Various locations,
www.laboulange.com

MATCHING HALF CAFE

The small neighborhood café at the corner of Fulton and Baker streets in the Panhandle doesn't bake its own MBs, but it does get a daily stash from Bakers of Paris. Shunning tradition, Bakers of Paris uses puff pastry and rolls its version with orange zest, making for a light, refreshingly acidic, not too sweet treat. Although you can't get one fresh out of the oven (Bakers of Paris' bakery is in Brisbane), Matching Half staff will heat it up for you. (Bakers of Paris also sells its buns at the Sunday farmers markets on Grove in the Divis Corridor and Irving in the Inner Sunset.)

1799 McAllister, SF. (415) 674-8699.
www.matchinghalfcafe.com

SEMIFREDDI'S

Sorry, you can't go to the source, and you won't get a warm one. But if you have access to a warming device — and you can wait — you can opt for one of Semifreddi's goodies. The bakery, which has its baking operations in the East Bay and no retail outlet, trucks its wonderfully caramelized, brioche-based MBs to numerous grocery stores, including Mollie Stone's, Berkeley Bowl, and Faletti Market. Perfect for when you really slept late.

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BEAN BAG CAFE

Staff picks: kick-ass brunches

We here at the Guardian don't survive on green buds and printer ink alone. We eat real food. Sometimes! But we do get up late and hungover. While we often forgo fancy brunch — unless we save our pennies for the amazing eggs-meet-legs “Sunday’s a Drag” buffet at Harry Denton’s (www.harrydenton.com) or dim sum nirvana at Yank Sing (www.yanksing.com) or Ton Kiang (www.tonkiang.net) — we’ll sure as shootin’ shell out for thrifty chilaquiles and bloody marys, especially the way the Bay makes ‘em. Here are some of our dearest bleary-eyed, late-morning tummy fillers.

BASHFUL BULL TOO

There are days when you wake up with a bladder full of Jameson’s and a fervent wish to sink into a salty, unglamor-

ous world of egg and cheese. These are the mornings when bottomless mimosas and goat cheese frittatas sound like fightin’ words. Easy tiger, I got you — just slump into a booth at Bashful Bull Too, the most standard of Outer Sunset diners. There’s no live jazz band, no “scene” at all — just you and your greasy calories. Get down on their cheap plates of hash browns and bacon, or better yet, a burger. Slabs of ground beef are acceptable fare when, after all, you’re having breakfast at 2 p.m. **(Caitlin Donohue)**

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BEAN BAG CAFÉ

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Become a regular at Bean Bag Café in the Western Addition, and they'll do all that and more. Bean Bag's extensive breakfast and lunch menu and progressive cooking staff means never having to decide if it's too late for Goldilocks oatmeal (yep, it's *just right*) or too early for pancakes and beer. Speaking of pancakes, the Bean Bag buttermilk, customized with bananas and caramelized walnuts on top, is a must-have. Pair it with scrambled eggs drenched in Tabasco, and you're set until 3 p. m., when Bean Bag kicks off its happy hour with beer for \$1.75. Other highlights: sunshine and a petting zoo of scruffy but wuv-able dogs outside.

(Diane Sussman)

601 Divisadero, SF. (415)-563-3634

CAFE DU SOLEIL

Lower Haight — known for its nicoise? *C'est vrai!* The salad nicoise at Cafe Du Soleil is a stunner, bursting with tender tuna, piquant greens, and enough fresh fixings to ensure

some inner sunshine. But don't stop there — or at the pastry case in front, with delectable goodies like croques madames and hazelnut chocolate croissants. Soleil's salmon tortilla, a sort of deconstructed-quiche pyramid topped with lovely lox and drizzled with smoky romesco, is this laidback Parisian hang's brunchtime piece de resistance. Bonus: hunky scruffsters and tattooed ladies.

(Marke B.)

200 Fillmore, SF. (415) 934-8637.
www.soleilsf.com

CHLOE'S

Let's face it, one aspect of brunch — at least on a Sunday — is the wait. Chloe's is no exception. The restaurant's rep and tiny size mean that while weekdays are fine, on the weekend you will be waiting in a (loose) line. The upside is that Chloe's is on a quiet corner of Church Street, so on a sunlit day, you'll get fresh air and nothing noisier or more imposing than the people-watching pleasure

of the J-Church sliding by. Once inside, indulge your sweet tooth: two highlights of the low-key menu are french toast made with croissants (served with strawberries and powdered sugar) and banana walnut pancakes, a Chloe's specialty. Chloe's offers some pleasant, simple variations on scrambled eggs, and the fresh fruit and white rosemary toast to complement them. This may be Noe Valley, but the coffee is *Twin Peaks* good.

(Johnny Ray Huston)

1399 Church, SF. (415) 648-4116

CHOW

The agony of brunch, since it allows for judgment-free consumption of lunch dishes or breakfast dishes, means having to choose between savory or sweet, sandwich or omelet, salad or hash browns. Ten minutes alone can be devoted to the age-old question of pancake or eggs benedict? Coffee or cocktail? Pancake or ... This is where Chow ends the cycle of neurosis.

At Chow, you can order one egg benedict and one pancake, accompanied by one cup of coffee and one wine mojito. Plus, Chow has two pancakes without peer: the blueberry with warm blueberry sauce and mascarpone cheese, and Marion's ricotta pancake with lemon. Get one of each! Of course, if you want the chilaquiles or a cheesy scramble, Chow will happily oblige. Watch them start to emit a soft, warm glow when paired with a blushing bellini. **(Diane Sussman)**

212 Church and 1245 Ninth Ave.
415-552-2469; 415-665-9912,
www.chowfoodbar.com

HOMEMADE CAFÉ

It's Saturday morning-slipping-toward-noon, and there are few reasons to expend the effort to pick your fuzzball head up off the pillow it dropped onto in the after-party wee hours. Curled in your cocoon, there is but one comforting thought: breakfast! Few places can revive

CONTINUES ON PAGE 10 >>

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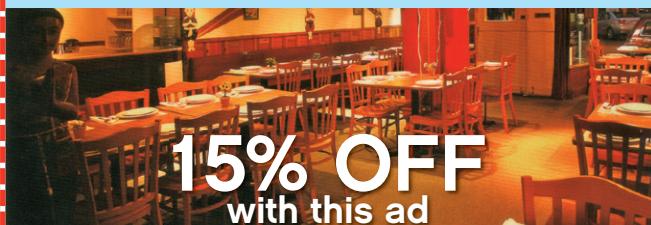


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Brunches CONT>>

the soul and satisfy the belly as proficiently as Homemade Café. You'd be wise to choose the spinach, mushroom, and feta omelet. Sweet or spicy is a tough choice, though, since there are spectacularly fluffy blueberry pancakes to be had as well. It's crucial that you remember this magical phrase: "Upgrade to Home-Fry Heaven." They'll arrive smothered in cheese, salsa, sour cream, and a choice of guacamole or pesto. You will feel alive again — at least until naptime. **(Rebecca Bowe)**

2454 Sacramento, Berk. (510)
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LIME

I love Lime. Not just because it offers a pretty good assortment of belly-filling foodstuffs on Sunday mornings or the hip and lively atmosphere — but because of the bottomless mimosas and bloody marys. Now, I could try to compare Lime's eggs benedict to others I've eaten, but why bother? There are bottomless fucking mimosas and bloody marys, people! Who cares about the food when I can get stupid drunk with my friends at 11 a.m.? In fact, I can't recall a time when we weren't asked to leave, albeit very nicely by the wait staff. Just be careful, those drinks will knock you on your ass and give you a hangover by 4 p.m. Guaranteed. **(Ben Hopfer)**
2247 Market St., SF. (415) 621-5256, www.lime-sf.com

LYNN & LU'S ESCAPADE CAFE

Lynn and Lu, I heart you. Snag a quaint table under an umbrella on Grand Avenue or find a spot on the back patio for a beautiful sunny brunch. The morning portions are fat, happy, and classic. Three-egg omelets come bursting with your filler of choice and arrive sitting next to a pile of yummy roasted potatoes. Those with stomachs bigger than their eyes will be relieved to see that the Escapade frittatas look more like a crowd-pleasing tower of peppers, veggies, and

eggs than a paltry single serving — everyone will waddle away with a smile. The service is fabulous, the price is just right, and the food comes quick enough to whisk away any dream-soaked cobwebs. **(Amber Schadewald)**
3353 Grand Ave, Oakland, 510-835-5705

MAMA'S ROYAL CAFÉ

Imagine a John Waters time warp with rickety counter chairs, a napkin art gallery, and a suggestive painting of female softball players with a giant bat, and you've just about captured the quirkiness of Mama's Royal Café. The home fries, hollandaise dishes, and rib-sticking omelets are consistently satisfying, but weekly specials also offer seasonal and delicious treats like lemon-ricotta pancakes with blood orange curd. The wait staff often serves on hipster time, which, quite frankly, works out perfectly since Mama's is best enjoyed with friends on a lazy Sunday as you discuss, or help each other remember, last night's misadventures.

(Robyn Johnson)

4012 Broadway, Oakland.
(510) 547-7600.

www.mamasroyalcafeoakland.com

STACKS

After a recent multihour hike around the Presidio, I found myself ravenous. You know the feeling — fully prepared to combine breakfast, lunch, dinner, a multitude of snacks, and dessert into a single meal. Where better to do that than at Stacks, the San Francisco location of a mini-chain (others are in Menlo Park and Burlingame) that looks like a Denny's that got an upscale makeover, with some of the biggest floral arrangements you'll ever see. Speaking of gigantic, Stacks' portions are robust, and their menu is a monster: over a dozen omelet choices; copious varieties of pancakes, crepes, and waffles; sandwiches and burgers; daily specials; and at least seven different smoothies. **(Cheryl Eddy)**

501 Hayes, SF. (415) 241-9011.
www.stacksrestaurant.com



CAFE DU SOLEIL

TAQUERIA LOS COYOTES

Being on a tight budget has forced me to get creative, and this underdog taqueria located on a block full of distracting alternatives has become my favorite spot for a weekend breakfast burrito. There are never any lines, the food is as cheap as it comes, and the egg and chorizo burrito with beans, cheese, and rice is guaranteed to soak up a whole weekend of leftover mischief hanging. It's even big enough to share with any co-conspirators still hanging out as well. **(Paula Connelly)**
3036 16th St., SF. (415) 861-3708.
www.taquerialoscoyotes.com

ZAZIE

Yes, there'll be a wait — but it's more than worth it at Zazie,

a French bistro that is San Francisco's best patio brunch spot. The heart of the menu resides in the poached egg dishes (my favorite is La Mer, with real Dungeness crab, avocado, and green onion), seven to choose from, each with a choice of one, two, or three perfectly poached eggs, wonderfully tangy hollandaise sauce, and a side of potatoes fried up with, get this, roasted garlic cloves. Yum! Everything on the brunch menu is awesome, from challah frou frou to scrambled eggs Fontainebleau to the full-on trout du sud. *C'est magnifique!* **(Steven T. Jones)**

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Throwing down with the Tablehopper

The incredibly everywhere Marcia Gagliardi, a.k.a. the Tablehopper (www.tablehopper.com), has somehow canvassed, in-depth, every eatery, drinkery, and food-cartery in our fair city — while still maintaining her voracious appetite, sassy aplomb, and appealing figure. Her new book, *The Tablehopper's Guide to Dining and Drinking in San Francisco* (Ten Speed Press) is one of those must-have recommendation books that truly opens your eyes and mouth to culinary nooks and crannies. Divided into a multitude of sections like “Situations” (places for dumping someone), “Morning After Breakfasts,” “Picky Eaters,” “Dude Food,” and “Ethnic Group Dinners,” it’s a fantastic thing to have on hand for every occasion, real or imagined. Marcia took a minute to answer some of our more “Guardian” questions about Bay dining and drinking. **(Marke B.)**

SFBG *I'm pansexual and bursting with spring fever. What bars or restaurants can I go to where the boys and girls and everything-in-between are hot and open to everything?*

Marcia Gagliardi I've always thought the Lush Lounge (1221 Polk, SF. 415-771-2022, www.lushloungesf.com) has a good mixed vibe, and it seems Blackbird (2124 Market, SF. 415-503-0630, www.blackbirdbar.com) draws a mixed crowd as well. **Orbit Room** (1900 Market, SF. 415-252-9525) too. Or just go to Beretta (1199 Valencia, SF. 415-695-1199, www.berettasf.com) late at night, sprinkle some Ecstasy on everyone's crispy thin-crust pizza, and see what happens.

SFBG *I have \$5 for dinner. Where should I go?*



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MG I'd go to Balompie Café (3349 18th St., SF. 415-648-9199) or El Zocalo (3230 Mission, SF. 415-282-2572) and get a couple of extremely filling pupusas, which come with chips and salsa. Yep, you can get some hot pupusa action for less than \$5. Hott!

SFBG Oh dear, I've doublebooked on date night. But then I get to thinking — why not take 'em both on at once? They might get into each other as well, and three's certainly company! What's a good place to have them both meet me and, once the initial confusion subsides, gently introduce the idea of a potentially delicious ménage à trois?

MG Well, hello, Ms. Popular. This is the kind of night that calls for some sexy atmosphere, and whaddya know, booze. The cozy downstairs booths at Oola (860 Folsom, SF. 415-995-2061, www.oola-sf.com) might fit the bill, and you can take turns licking the sauce from the yummy, sticky, baby back ribs off each other's fingers.

SFBG My parents are on their way to take me out to dinner, but I just got really stoned. Where will my goofy demeanor blend right in?

MG Florio (1915 Fillmore, SF. 415-775-4300, www.floriosf.com) would work because its dandy-yet-friendly atmosphere is parental-unit approved, the lights are dim, the hearty food will jive with your munchies, and there's usually enough going on in there that your parents won't be watching your every move. There's also a little alley around the corner where you can spark up if you need another puff before dessert.

SFBG Best place to announce my impending gender reassignment surgery to someone close to me who may be surprised?

MG Absinthe (398 Hayes, SF. 415-551-1590, www.absinthe.com). You can request a quieter table so not everyone hears your answers to all of your friend's burning questions, and the spirited cocktails — a coquettishly tangy Ginger Rogers or bourbon-

spiked Scarlett O'Hara, perhaps? — will help them digest the good news.

SFBG Someone took me out on a date to a really expensive restaurant and insisted on paying. Now it's my turn to take them out, but I'm like, down to my last \$20. Where can I take them so they feel I've treated them to something classier than my budget suggests?

MG Ah yes, the old smoke and mirrors. I'd go to Great Eastern in Chinatown (649 Jackson, SF. 415-986-2500), which has some bountiful deals on set menus, and the room is spiffy. Or you could take them to dim sum at one of my favorite places, S&T Hong Kong Seafood (2578 Noriega, SF. 415-665-8338) in the Outer Sunset, and you will feast for cheap.

SFBG What wine bars have the best pours? I mean top-of-the-glass for \$6. I'm a-thirsty, girl!

MG Well, the folks working the bar at Castro's 2223 (2223 Market, SF. 415-431-0692,

www.2223restaurant.com) know their clientele well and do pretty big pours. Same with Laszlo (2526 Mission, SF. 415-401-0810, www.laszlobar.com). I also noted a fuller glass the last time I was at the Hidden Vine (620 Post, SF. 415-674-3567, www.thehiddenvine.com). And based on the number of loaded folks at the Wine Jar (1870 Fillmore, SF. 415-931-2924, www.winejar-sf.com), I'd say the generous pours are to blame.

SFBG What would you say are the most "interesting" things you've ever eaten in the city?

MG Some of the dishes at Spices! (294 Eighth Ave., SF. 415-752-8884) have definitely pushed the envelope for me. (Stinky tofu, intestine stew — and I don't care to have either dish ever again). The tendon pho at Pho Tan Hoa (431 Jones, SF. 415-673-3163) definitely rates on the funky meter — and I'm talking big hunks of tendon. **SFBG**



THE FREE FARM

GUARDIAN PHOTOS BY CHARLES RUSSO

Pioneers! O urban pioneers!

How to homestead without going rural

By Robyn Johnson
culture@sfbg.com

People are returning to land like it's the 1970s all over again, but they're not packing up for Vermont, letting their hair go au naturel, and unplugging from the grid to do it. Urban agriculture is sprouting up like, well, sprouts. And while we all feel strongly about sustainability and pay a lot of lip service to higher ideals, the majority of us probably aren't willing to adopt the radical homemaker lifestyle and sacrifice cell phone coverage, *The Colbert Report*, or regular social interactions. The following cursory guide highlights a few urban farms in SF and immediate environs where you can volunteer or access food, as well as resources for cultivating your space in the

concrete tangle (even if you live in a third-story apartment) and options for the time-honored tradition of gleaning.

MANY FARMHANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

Community farms offer support not always available for the individual plots of community gardens (which typically have astronomically long wait-lists anyway), or even your own cramped Bay Area backyard. And for 60-hour-work-weekers, it might be taxing to grow more than a bit of basil or mold on that cheese in the back of the fridge. If you don't have the time, energy, space, or inclination to follow famed urban farmer Novella Carpenter's fantastic example (ghosttownfarm.wordpress.com), consider volunteering at the following places to satisfy

your green thumb's bidding.

As Chris Burley, the director of **Hayes Valley Farm** (www.hayesvalleyfarm.com) told me, "People are looking for a tangible way to get their hands dirty and address the impacts of our ecologically destructive, industrialized food system while doing something meaningful and connecting with their community." And that's exactly the goal that the farm, located off Laguna and Fell streets, has been aiming to fulfill since its inception as a way to revitalize an unused lot, once a freeway onramp, into a shared space.

Although the farm is still taking root, so to speak, the plan is to eventually grow enough fresh and organic food to feed the neediest nearby members plus

the volunteers working to cultivate the space. Education also plays a major part in the function of the project, with Thursday and Sunday "work parties" where people can get that hand-dirtying experience, as well as regular classes on urban gardening and permaculture.

Altho **Quesada Gardens Initiative** (www.quesadagardens.org) primarily operates as a community-directed organization that seeks to strengthen the social systems of Bayview-Hunters Point, local food production has become one of the top concerns of the neighborhood. The resident-led nonprofit connects and maintain backyard farms and free food-producing community gardens throughout the area. In one of the neater facets of its food justice work, the group also helps maintain the kitchen garden of roving supper club **Old Skool Café** (www.oldschoolcafe.org), which employs at-risk or previously incarcerated

ated youth. With such kick-ass people, it's no wonder that urban farm hero Will Allen adopted one of the satellite gardens on his visit to the Bayview. Community volunteer meetings and gardening days tend to be informal, so e-mail for specific opportunities.

Sometimes the best things in life really are free. Located at Gough and Eddy on land kindly lent by the Lutheran Church, **The Free Farm** (www.thefreefarm.org) intends to give away 100 percent of its produce. Still in its initial development stages, the fledgling project welcomes volunteers every Saturday and Wednesday from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. to help with the launch. Working in tandem with its sister organization, **The Free Farm Stand** in the Mission also offers fresh fruits and vegetables donated by other local urban farmers. Although places like **Little City Gardens** (www.littlecitygardens.com) and folks who glean from public land contribute, the bulk of the produce comes from the 18th Street and Rhode Island (www.18thandrhodeisland.org) farm maintained by the SF Permaculture Guild, which offers volunteer opportunities as well. With a goal to sextuple the farm's output within the next five years, it could probably use a little bit more help. Work days are on Friday.

For West Oakland residents, two nonprofits have been power-housing to combat the food desert that plagues the area. **City Slickers Farms** (www.cityslickerfarms.org) operates several all volunteer-run farms throughout the neighborhood that could always use a few extra work hands. Collectively these six lots cultivate ducks and chickens, bee hives, veggies, fruit trees, and medicinal herbs, the produce of which are distributed through the **Saturday Farm Stand** on a sliding scale or work-trade basis — no one's turned away. And if you still have a mighty urge for some composting, weeding, planting, and mulching, **People's Grocery**

(www.peoplesgrocery.org) runs three farms that constantly need tending. The 55st Street location tends fruit trees, culinary herbs, and vegetables; 59th Street is a slightly less cultivated space in collaboration with **Berkeley's Spiral Gardens Community Food Security Project** (www.spiralgardens.org), which runs its own food garden off Oregon and Sacramento streets for you West Berkeleyites. People's Grocery's newest land acquisition, the plot behind the California Hotel off of 35th and Chestnut streets, hosts a greenhouse and a biointensive microfarm that replaced its 3.5 acre Sunol site last January.

HOME SWEET URBAN HOMESTEAD

If you have access to private land to cultivate, or even if you don't, the following resources will set you on the path to food freedom. These classes, demonstration sites, and professional landscaping services will help you turn backyards, rooftops, and even windows into humming generators of small-scale urban agriculture.

Before you even think to take a shovel to your virgin backyard or start a worm bin, visit **Garden for the Environment** (www.gardenfortheenvironment.org). A one-acre demonstration garden in the heart of Golden Gate Heights that also teaches organic food production and sustainable landscaping with weekly workshops, you can see how it's done before trial-and-erroring on that graywater irrigation system or chicken coop. The resource directory on its Web site also serves as an invaluable aid for at-home troubleshooting. Hotlines for gardening and composting issues, where to find recycled lumber, how to test your soil, manure suppliers, wasp removal companies — it's all there.

DIY food production classes abound everywhere in the Bay Area but the one-stop shopper won't find a better resource than the **Institute of Urban Homesteading** (www.iuhoakland.com) in Oakland. It offers a

comprehensive curriculum ranging from beekeeping, butchery, goat farming, brewcraft, herbal medicine, bread making, fermentation, berry patches, and other topics of the same ilk. It's a real crash course in manifesting your inner Laura Ingalls Wilder. With no central location, classes are taught in the teachers' homes, which presents a neat opportunity to see real-time urban homesteading and the different ways people create sustainable places in an urban setting. Also consider **Urban Kitchen SF** (www.urbankitchensf.com) and **BioFuel Oasis** (www.biofueloasis.com) in Berkeley for supplementary courses.

If you're feeling overwhelmed and green behind the ears, several services will landscape your yard into a cornucopia of organic delectables and even continue the maintenance if you just can't do anything with that black thumb of death. **Star Apple Edible Gardens** (www.starappleediblegardens.com) provides a range of services throughout the Bay Area, the simplest being consultations and composting tutorials. You also can order ready-made kitchen gardens or go whole kit and caboodle and have customized "garden design and installation, pathway and hardscape installation, irrigation design and installation, planting, plant feeding and cultivation, regular harvesting of your garden crops, and design, installation, and maintenance of composting systems." Other similar businesses include **All Edibles** (www.alledibles.com), which specifically works with East Bay dwellers, and Chris Sein of **Wildheart Gardens** (www.wildheartgardens.com), who also consults on backyard chickens and mushrooms.

For a lot of us in the Bay Area, the dream of having a backyard is about as likely as Glenn Beck admitting that Obama is not a herald of an impending Orwellian dictatorship. So what can the more dispossessed among us do to return to the

soil? Popular in Europe and becoming more so here, rooftop gardens are a great solution to space issues. **Graze the Roof** (www.grazetherooftop.blogspot.com), the community vegetable patch on top of Glide Memorial Church, hosts rooftop gardening workshops. You can also gain experience by volunteering on work days every Thursday or first Saturdays. For those feeling less than philanthropic or sociable, pop over to your local bookstore to pick up the *Use Your Roof Guidebook* by **Bay Area Localize** (www.baylocalize.org). Seven bucks and four easy chapters gets you on your way to a more edible roof.

For balcony-less apartment dwellers, and maybe those with vaulted ceilings, window farms have become the new rooftop gardens. An open-source project that's evolved over the past year, **Windowfarms** (www.windowfarms.org) gives how-tos for its innovatively cheap and space-conscious hydroponics system — jerry-rigged from repurposed plastic water bottles, tubing, and fish tank pumps that hangs in vertical columns in the window — as free PDFs on its Web site. It also hosts community boards where members share improvements to the system, which is constantly being updated. Alas, window farms can only really successfully raise leafy greens, but having a homegrown salad in a studio apartment is still pretty darn amazing.

YARD SHARING IS CARING

If you already have your urban farm bustling along — or even just a prolific citrus tree — then yard-sharing is a great way to spread the fruit of your labor throughout the community.

Neighborhood Fruit (www.neighborhoodfruit.com), **SF Glean** (www.sfglean.org), and **Produce to the People** (www.producetothepeople.org) will gladly help you to unload the excess bounty and distribute it to the hungry. **SFBG**

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Free crystal glass!

Culinary adventures in Asian dessert cafes

By Caitlin Donohue
culture@sfbg.com

Should ceaseless hangovers and clumsy, inebriated behavior ever sour you on the drinking scene, you could do worse than while away an evening in one of SF's many pan-Asian dessert cafes. Cheap prices, pleasant late-night crowds, cultural cachet ... the sole caveat being that, for the neophyte dabbler in casual Asian cuisine, menus can approach this side of incomprehensible. This thought came to me midway through ordering at **Tapioca Express** (1522 Fillmore, (415) 346-6600. www.tapiocaexpress.com). A whim had struck me for bubble tea, but in my naiveté, I had come unprepared for what lay ahead. A universe of flavors, forms, and toppings were at my fingertips — it's not unusual for a café to feature more than 80 bubble tea options; variations on form, flavoring, and toppings ("free crystal glass," which to me sounds like a great deal on street drugs). Even ignoring the savorys, I was at a loss.

But I squashed the disorientation and walked away with an avocado snow, a tapioca-beaded milkshake whose creamy taste will dispel any hesitation you have toward desserts made from nacho ingredients. Sitting with my prize and savoring the peaceful, nonalcoholic hum around me, I knew: I was hooked. I needed more dessert cafe. And thus it began, the adventures of a white girl in the land of taro, grass jelly, and tadpoles.

As if the culinary adventures at **Creations Dessert House** (5217 Geary, (415) 668-8812, www.creationsdessert.com) weren't enough food for thought, the ambience, as in other specimens of its genre, strikes an odd balance between coffeehouse

and sit-down restaurant. Rather than highlighting its bubble teas, the ginormous menu focuses on hearty snacks, from fast food-like "value boxes" to potato polenta-esque radish cakes topped with fish sauce, and elaborately plated desserts (bowls of cubed fruits and ice cream nestled neatly alongside each other, rather than the helter-skelter mix-up found on most Western plates). The waitress will bring you complimentary hot tea while you ponder your options.

An after-school crowd and a more fast food vibe prevails at **Quickly** (2116 Irving and various SF locations, (415) 665-3090, www.quicklyusa.com), a global megachain that provides a gateway to bubble tea from New Zealand to Singapore. I learned about Quickly's ubiquity from the café's helpfully excessive signage, which also alerted me to its "new healthy fashion food" with "fiber green milk tea, black rice, and colis milk." Eschewing the fried mini octopi and hot grass jelly, a plant-based pudding treat, I opted for a saccharine sweet rose bubble tea. And, in a bit of providence, I tried the Hong Kong egg puff, which turned out to be a crispy, waffle-bubble wrap marriage. It's folded into a paper envelope, which fit nicely into my heart. New favorite thing!

Imagine, then, my elation at discovering that this mysterious egg puff was not a solely corporate creation — that, in fact, a sojourn into the Outer Sunset (SF's epicenter of Asian dessert pleasures) will reveal **Eggettes** (3136 Noriega, (415) 681-8818, www.eggettesf.com), whose specialty is the puff. Eggettes has the distinction of three flavors; original, chocolate, and honey-

37 DEGREES DESSERT CAFÉ



dew, whose golden-brown crust cedes to a chewy green dough within. Eggettes features the usual phalanx of bubble teas, and for the packs of adolescents usually present, not just free wireless but free computers! Imagine! Should you go, try the rice rolls, flat noodles rolled into delicious chewy nuggets, accompanied by peanut and hoisin sauce.

The challenge of dessert cafes may be what relentlessly pulls us to them — the variety of their wares. After all, the menu at **37 Degrees Dessert Café** (1155 Taraval, (415) 566-3887) is a solid 10 pages long, filled with evocative photos to guide your deliberations. Dare you try the Deep Sea, whose striated layers of sweet liquid and “coral jellies” resemble nothing more than the dentist office’s saltwater aquarium tank

poured into a tall ice cream sundae glass? Will you opt for the crystal rolls at **100% Sweet Café** (2512 Clement, (415) 221-1628), small rice paper sachets of sugary goo, fresh strawberries, and mangos that constitute the most difficult and slippery food item to eat ever?

All told, the dessert cafes made a distinct impression on me. Situated at a small table, plied with free hot tea, megalith menu in hand detailing lobster balls, black pearl barley, and cold tofu flakes curdled in a wooden bucket — it’s easy to lose a few hours contemplating the fact that one will never, ever know all there is to be eaten under the sun.

But a girl can try. Osmanthus jelly with a side of explosive eggs, please? **SFBG**



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We're used to well-crafted, artisanal cocktails year-round in our city, and some bartenders showcase the bounty of the seasons in their cocktails, using local fruits, herbs, vegetables. It's easy to take the abundance of the region for granted, but let's not and remember to enjoy what can happen when fresh produce and spirits get into the right hands. Here are a few places and drinks we recommend as winter turns to spring. (Virginia Miller)

BEET COCKTAILS AT THE ALEMBIC

The Alembic offers quite a selection of spirits and beer, plus some of our city's best cocktails, including New Orleans' classics done right. (Thankfully, the bar doesn't let the small space get too crowded, it regulates crowds at the door during peak hours. Even so, I prefer "off" times during the afternoon or early weeknights). The staff knows its stuff, so go ahead and ask them to make you something off menu with your favorite spirit as a base. In recent weeks, I've seen wonders worked with fresh produce on hand, whether it beets, ginger, or even galangal. A couple versions of a beet cocktail wowed me each time, the latest being a Rittenhouse Rye base with dry vermouth, red wine vinegar, orange zest muddled with sugar, and plenty of beets for a glowing red hue. Topped with a celery leaf and splash of sparkling wine, it's a tart, earthy, slightly effervescent delight. If no beets are in house, you can't go wrong with menu staple, Southern Exposure (\$10), a Junipero Gin cocktail brightened with mint leaves, lime, a touch of sugar and a shot of fresh celery juice.

1725 Haight, SF. (415) 666-0822, www.alembicbar.com

KUMQUAT CAIPIRINHA AT NOPA

If you want to be ahead of the curve tasting a new small batch spirit no one has heard of or cocktails unlike anyone else's, Nopa is your spot. Bar manager

ager Neyah White, who's always ahead of trends and has a pioneer's taste for the untried, has introducing me to spirits I'll later hear everyone talking about. Neyah and the Nopa bar staff create luscious cocktails — try one of their sherry or white whiskey renditions for a proper use of the spirits. If you're lucky, the kumquats they've been procuring for weeks will still be on the menu for a kumquat caiprinha (\$9). I've had kumquats in a number of cocktails — the juicy tart is a lifelong favorite taste. Not only are Nopa's kumquats the best I've had in recent memory, but the use of Boca Loca Cachaca and fresh lime with the plump, tart citrus makes for a bracing drink: pleasantly sweet, floral, tangy. I ate every kumquat out of the glass.

560 Divisadero, SF. (415) 864-8643, www.nopasf.com

KENTUCKY BUCK AT RICKHOUSE

Rickhouse has one of those dream menus for cocktailians: pages and pages of flips, fizzes, and punches. The atmosphere holds the magic mustiness of a dim old bourbon house — without the must. (You just have to brave — or avoid — the Financial District happy hour mobs). From Rickhouse's beverage director, Erick Castro, comes a drink created last spring that has thankfully stuck around: the Kentucky Buck. A refreshing bourbon and ginger beer cocktail (\$8), it is one of the best-balanced bucks I've tasted. ("Buck" is the historic name for drinks involving a base spirit, citrus, and ginger beer or ale). Bourbon is served with organic Monterey Bay Farms' strawberries, lemon, Angostura bitters, then topped with ginger beer. Refreshing and spring-like, it's nuanced, showcasing all the strawberry's best assets without overstepping into sweet territory.

246 Kearney, SF. (415) 398-2827, www.rickhousebar.com



GUARDIAN PHOTO BY VIRGINIA MILLER

TRACK 42 AT 15 ROMOLO

Thankfully, this cocktail has been on the menu a while, a glass of layered delights from one of our city's best all-around bars, 15 Romolo. Track 42 (\$12) is an exhilarating fresh garden of a drink made with 42 Below Manuka Honey Vodka, basil, unfiltered apple juice, lemon, and egg white. You won't go wrong with most anything on (or off) the menu, but this treat involves more complexity and nuanced flavor than the "vodka cocktail" label would suggest, and is a favorite among many, many delectable drinks. Other highlights: I love the Prohibition-era elegance, laid back staff, and legendary Chartreuse Gong Shows — *American Idol*-like karaoke shows with judges, a giant gong if you suck, and, yes, shots of chartreuse for everyone. 15 Romolo is the bar I wish

was in my neighborhood.

15 Romolo Place, SF. (415) 398-1359, www.15romolo.com

EVERGREEN AT RANGE

Range sets the standard for experimental but refined cocktails. This is one of the great neighborhood restaurants, but it's also a worthy bar destination. You can expect fresh and inventive here every time — with classic cocktail sensibilities. The Evergreen welcomes spring with gusto in the form of citrus and herbs. Plymouth Gin and St. Germain accompany fresh kumquat juice, sage, and lemon. Smooth and bright, not one flavor overpowers the other, but all meld nicely. If tequila is more your speed, try the Malia with Pueblo Viejo blanco tequila, lime, egg white, cinnamon bitters, and a winning duo of quince and apple.

842 Valencia, SF. (415) 282-8283, www.rangesf.com **SFBG**



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